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AUTHOR Rosenblum, Sandra; Goldberg, Joan Carol
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ABSTRACT

The task of adult educators is to provide students with information as well as opportunities to explore alternatives to the arms race. As a starting point to raising nuclear issues in the classroom and incorporating them into the curriculum, the adult educator can administer a survey or questionnaire to students about nuclear weapons and the threat of nuclear war. Materials and topics concerning nuclear war can be used in reading comprehension, math, composition, environmental science, and child psychology classes. Adult educators also feel the additional responsibility of promoting awareness and discussion of peace issues in the community. They can approach these concerns by incorporating them into a PTA meeting, discussing age-appropriate materials and techniques for dealing with these questions, making lists of materials available, and sharing ideas with others involved in community education. Adult educators must also provide students with the opportunities for taking action. Activities can include influencing policymakers before election time and holding disarmament demonstrations. (YLB)

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Sandra Rosenblum
Director of Staff Education and Training
New York State Psychiatric Institute

Joan Carol Goldberg
Adjunct Instructor
Onondaga Community College
Syracuse, New York

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The Responsibility of Adult Educators in the Nuclear Age

The nuclear arms race escalates, arms control agreements fail to materialize and increasingly more devastating weapons of destruction are being produced and deployed. Faced with the threat of nuclear annihilation during their own lifetimes, large numbers of citizens—including educators—are actively working toward preventing a nuclear holocaust. Because of our particular role as educators of adults, we believe we are especially qualified to assume the responsibility of educating for peace.

How we can incorporate topics related to nuclear war most appropriately depends, of course, on our particular educational setting and student population. But regardless of whether we are involved in ABE, GED, continuing education on a college campus, or in a community setting, the task is to provide students with information as well as opportunities to explore alternatives to the arms race. Thus, through debate and dialogue can beliefs be clarified and rational decisions made.

There are various ways nuclear issues can be raised in a classroom and become incorporated into the curriculum. As a starting point, administer a survey or questionnaire to students about nuclear weapons and the threat of nuclear war. This process can help teachers evaluate the learners' knowledge of the subject as well as understand their feelings and concerns. This will enable the teacher to meet the learners' needs for both information and support. Relevant newspaper and magazine articles can be used for reading comprehension exercises; graphs and charts can be constructed and/or interpreted for a math lesson. Topics such as "How I Envision the World After a Nuclear War" can be assigned for essay writing; the environmental effects of a nuclear war might form the basis of a discussion in an environmental science class; or the effects on children of living in a nuclear age might be the subject of a child psychology class.

In addition, various departments in colleges and universities can set up such credit and non-credit courses as "The History of the Arms Race" or "Perspectives on Nuclear War Issues." Academic departments or campus-based organizations might sponsor films, speakers, student-faculty teach-ins, community forums, or workshops.

As educators of adults, we also feel the additional responsibility of promoting awareness and discussion of peace issues in our communities. How can we help other adults address such concerns as "What About the Russians?" or increase their understanding of the history of the arms race? How can we use our particular skills and expertise outside as well as within the educational community?

We believe it is possible for adult educators to approach these and other similar topics in various community settings using diverse approaches and resources. For example, parents and educators can be helped to better understand and respond to children's anxieties by incorporating these issues into a PTA meeting or by discussing age-appropriate materials and techniques for dealing with these questions. Speakers representing different disciplines and perspectives can be invited to appear at community meetings. Lists of books, periodicals, films and other resources can be made available to appropriate groups.

Finding and sharing ideas with other individuals who have been involved in community education may also be helpful. What were their approaches? What problems did they encounter? How did they deal with them? Are they aware of additional community resources?

It has been our experience that one does not have to be an "expert" to raise issues relating to nuclear war. Just introducing the subject provides an opportunity for teacher and student to learn together, to share information and ideas. Arms race issues need to be related to adults' lives and work experiences by addressing the connection between the escalating military budget and the drastic cuts in training programs, student loans, human service and welfare programs.

Finally, if we believe that our mission as adult educators is to empower our students to take control of their own lives, then we must provide the student with the opportunities for taking action. If we merely

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encourage students to bare their feelings and overwhelm them with facts and statistics, we may leave the students feeling powerless. Simply presenting information is not enough; practical application through appropriate action is a necessary follow-up.

At the same time, however, taking individual differences into account, we realize the need for people to take action in ways that are appropriate, so that they will feel comfortable as well as effective. Thus, we advocate a broad range of activities. Various ways to influence policy makers and hence policies can be explored before election time. For example, not only can political education programs about candidates and relevant issues be organized to inform voters, but the candidates, themselves, can be educated about their constituents' views through direct meetings as well as letter-writing campaigns. For other individuals, disarmament demonstrations, such as the one held in New York City, on June 12th, 1982, will provide the perfect vehicle for expressing strong feelings and beliefs about nuclear war.

As adult educators, we must bring up the issues of the nuclear freeze and disarmament to our own professional organizations, proposing resolutions which support these views. In addition we must unite with others of different backgrounds, political beliefs, and professions to achieve our goals. If we agree to a commitment to help secure the survival of the world for our own generation and for future generations, we must then assume the responsibility as adult educators of incorporating issues of nuclear war and disarmament into our work to make this commitment a reality.

If you are interested in being involved in a network through which we as adult educators can communicate concerns, exchange information and ideas, etc., related to nuclear peace issues, please contact either Joan Goldberg, 3422 Barron Road, Marcellus, New York 13108, (315) 673-1083 or Sandra Rosenblum, 66 West 94 Street, New York, New York 10025, (212) 866-4466.